



**Veterans Health  
Administration**

VA NEBRASKA-WESTERN IOWA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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# NEWS RELEASE

**GRAND ISLAND VA MEDICAL CENTER SPONSORING  
CREATIVE ARTS COMPETITION FOR AREA VETERANS;  
DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS SET AT AUGUST 13**

**RELEASED BY  
KEVIN HYNES**

*Event part of national Veterans Creative Arts Competition*

June 30, 2021

**For Immediate Release**

OMAHA, Neb. – Central Nebraska Veterans: Are you an artist or writer? If so, the Grand Island VA Medical Center wants to hear from you.

Area military Veterans who receive their care at the Grand Island Medical Center, the Holdrege VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) or the North Platte VA CBOC are invited to participate in this year's Veterans Creative Arts Competition. The event is part of the larger Veterans National Creative Arts Competition, which is co-presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Legion Auxiliary.

"This competition is designed to help provide Veterans with a creative outlet through which they can express themselves and showcase their artistic and written talents," said Alicia Wicht, a Grand Island VA Medical Center Whole Health Program health coach who is serving as the chair of the local Veterans Creative Arts Competition planning group. "We have so many area Veterans who have real creative talents. We also know that engaging in creative activities has some real therapeutic benefits, which are particularly important to Veterans."

According to Wicht, this will mark the second time that the Grand Island VAMC has sponsored a local Veterans Creative Arts Competition. Last year's event, which was held prior to the arrival of the Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, attracted between 40 and 50 entries from local Veteran artists and writers.

"I was just floored by the amount of submissions we received and the amount of talent that these Veterans have. So many of our area Veterans have incredible artistic skills that are simply hidden away because they don't have an outlet through which to display these talents," Wicht said. She said that last year's submissions involved a wide array of subjects and mediums, from photography, to pencil drawings and scroll-making. "The talent on display was just mind-blowing."

Take Dave Olson, for example. A U.S. Army Veteran who served as a unit welder, mechanic and truck driver during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Olson got involved in the national competition three years ago at the urging of the VA staff at the Grand Island VA Medical Center.

"I've always enjoyed doing artwork," said Olson, who said he loved to draw on the whiteboards stationed around the Grand Island VAMC. Members of the Grand Island VA staff soon took notice of Olson's talents and encouraged him to enter the competition.

Last year, Olson entered a metal sculpture. This year he's branching out with a 3-dimensional leather carving that he's currently working on. Olson is also now a member of the Grand Island's VAMC's Veterans Creative Art Competition planning group.

Olson said the praise he's received is nice, but he's in it for much different reasons. "Being recognized for your artwork is really just the icing on the top," he added. "For me, it's the working on the artwork that gives me the most satisfaction."

Olson said he's constantly encouraging his fellow Veterans to give the competition a try. "There are a couple of Veterans who I am in contact with almost weekly. I will ask them how their artwork is going and whether they need any help from me," Olson said. "We've actually become kind of a community through these projects."

This year's competition includes three separate categories: Kit, Creative Writing and Applied Art, along with two "Special Art" categories. The Kit Category involves such things as Leather Craft, Wood Working, Fabric Art or others. The Creative Writing Category involves such things as Poetry, Short Story, Personal Experience Short or Essays. The Applied Art Category involves such things as Acrylic Painting, Watercolor, Carving, Glass Art, Color Photography, Oil Painting, Sculpture and others. *(For a full list of categories and rules, Veterans are encouraged to check out the website at [https://www.nebraska.va.gov/locations/Grand\\_Island.asp](https://www.nebraska.va.gov/locations/Grand_Island.asp) )*

The submissions will be displayed at the Nebraska Building during the 2021 State Fair in Grand Island, Aug. 27 – Sept. 6. Winners will be announced after the conclusion of the fair.

"With the amazing submissions we received last year, we thought that the State Fair would be an outstanding venue so that people from across the state can see them," said Gina Woods, Rural Health Training and Education coordinator at the Grand Island VA Medical Center.

Woods added that local Veterans service organizations, such as the Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary GI Chapter and the American Legion Auxiliary District 6, have also banded together to donate art and display supplies to aid Veterans in this year's efforts. A glass display case has also been donated by American Legion Auxiliary Department of Nebraska to allow Veterans to have their artwork displayed at the Grand Island VAMC throughout the year.

Local first place winners will have the opportunity to compete in the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual. National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival to be held in St. Petersburg, Florida, in April 2022.

Entry forms can be picked up at any VA clerk station or Whole Health Building 6 on the Grand Island VA Medical Center Campus. Entry forms can also be downloaded from the GIVA website [https://www.nebraska.va.gov/locations/Grand\\_Island.asp](https://www.nebraska.va.gov/locations/Grand_Island.asp) **Entry forms and all artwork/creative writing pieces are due by August 13, 2021, by 4 p.m.**

For more information, please contact Alicia Wicht, Grand Island VA Medical Center Whole Health Program, 308-395-3404, or via email at [alicia.wicht@va.gov](mailto:alicia.wicht@va.gov)

**Public Affairs Note:** Media interested in interviewing a member of the Grand Island VAMC Veterans Creative Arts Competition planning group, please contact the VA NWIHCS Public Affairs Office at 402-995-4719 or by emailing [kevin.hynes@va.gov](mailto:kevin.hynes@va.gov).